

RITUAL AND PERFORMANCE

Richard Schechner

Rituals are performative: they are acts done; and performances are ritualized: they are codified, repeatable actions. The functions of theatre identified by Aristotle and Horace—entertainment, celebration, enhancement of social solidarity, education (including political education), and healing—are also functions of ritual. The difference lies in context and emphasis. Rituals emphasize efficacy: healing the sick, initiating neophytes, burying the dead, teaching the ignorant, forming and cementing social relations, maintaining (or overthrowing) the status quo, remembering the past, propitiating the gods, exorcising the demonic, maintaining cosmic order. Theatre emphasizes entertainment; it is opportunistic, occurring wherever and whenever a crowd can be gathered and money collected, or goods or services bartered. Rituals are performed on schedule, at specific locations, regardless of weather or attendance. They mark days and places of importance (Lent to Easter in Christendom, the half-month leading up to *dasahara* among Hindus, New Year's Day in Japan, Ramadan and the hadj in Islam, and so on); or are hung on life's hinges where individual experience connects to society: rites of passage send people through birth, puberty, marriage, induction, resignation, and death. Ritual texts—verbal, musical and theatrical—are fixed and often sacred. When improvisation is encouraged, as in the ritual clowning of native American or African shamans, strict rules govern who the clowns are, whom they aim their laughter at, and what kinds of obscene or other farcical acts they perform. But this list of differences (not oppositions) does not support the tendency in Western scholarship to suppose that ritual performance precedes or is at the origin of theatre. The Sanskrit text on performance, *Natyasastra* (second century BC to second century AD), is correct on this point. 'In drama there is no exclusive representation of humans or the gods; for the drama is a representation of the states of the three worlds' (i.e. of gods, humans and demons) (Bharata-muni 1967:14). In other words, far from being limited to the divine, the human or the demonic, the field represented by drama covers *all*

there is, all that is possibly conceivable. The inclusiveness posited by the *Natyasastra* is confirmed by anthropological evidence. Phenomena that rightly ought to be called 'theatre' or 'dance' occur among all the world's peoples and date back at least to Palaeolithic times. Dancing, singing, wearing masks and costumes; impersonating other people, animals, gods, and demons (and being possessed by these others); acting out narratives; rehearsing or in other ways preparing actions; and making ready places where people can gather to perform and witness performances, are all integral to being human. Theatre and ritual are as night and day, chicken and egg – neither has priority over the other.

PERFORMANCE IN PALAEOLITHIC EUROPE

The earliest known performance spaces are the caves of south-west Europe where, for example at Tuc d'Audoubert, one must 'crawl through claustrophobic low passages to reach the startling footprints of ancient dancers in bare feet and the models of copulating bisons, in clay on the floor beyond' (La Barre 1972:397). What was going on in this barely accessible theatre (or temple or shrine)? The size and shape of the footprints indicate that the dancers, not yet fully grown, moved crouching in a circle; surviving bone and ivory artefacts indicate that they danced accompanied by percussive sounds and perhaps the roar of bullroarers (Pfeiffer 1982:180-4). Although it is probable that a ritual was being performed, it is wrong to dismiss the possibility that it also involved self-conscious theatrical display. Recent evidence – chemical analysis of the paints used in the caves – indicates that perhaps 'each prehistoric artist or group of artists had its own hallmark paint recipes just as did the studios of Renaissance Italy' (Wilford 1990:C1).

The caves also show traces of masking and impersonation – of acting in the theatrical sense. The famous 'sorcerer' of Les Trois Freres (Figure 1) is a composite. He has human feet and legs, a lion's or bear's claws, a lion's torso and testicles, a dangling penis that could be human or animal, and a long horse's or wolf's tail. His face, topped by tufted ears and deer's antlers, is twisted sharply to the left, staring directly out through wide owl's eyes. He is in a half-human, half-animal crouching pose, his right foot raised as if dancing. This figure is a masked performer costumed in animal skins. The sorcerer's expression and pose resemble those of a Yaqui deer dancer (Figure 2). Indeed, the function of the Yaqui dance may be close to what was going on deep in Tuc d'Audoubert: a fertility rite. The Yaquis sing to the deer they hunt, asking its permission to make the kill; this is common among hunting peoples, who know that what is taken must be replenished.

By using a self-conscious theatrical display to assure themselves of replenishment, people express a double desire: first, to be in a positive relationship to natural forces, and second, to be able to invent symbolic, representational techniques – theatre, if you will – that successfully put them into such a relationship. In other words, the representations – the rituals,

paintings and dances become the focus of attention preceding and following any number of direct encounters with 'nature'. Nature is thus mediated by means of performative representation. This invention of consciously symbolic action the mastery of the artist is experienced not only as functional ritual but also as entertainment. Entertainment is meant here in its fullest sense: actions enjoyed not only for what they can achieve beyond the setting of the performance itself, but also for the sheer pleasure that they bring in the here and now. Thus probably in the Palaeolithic epoch, as in today's world, fun was an intrinsic part of ritual performance. The tendency to deny this has more to do with the anti-theatrical bias of Judaeo-Christian and Islamic traditions (see Barish 1981) than with anything else. Indeed, having a good time is integral to many ritual performances, including Christian ones influenced by non-

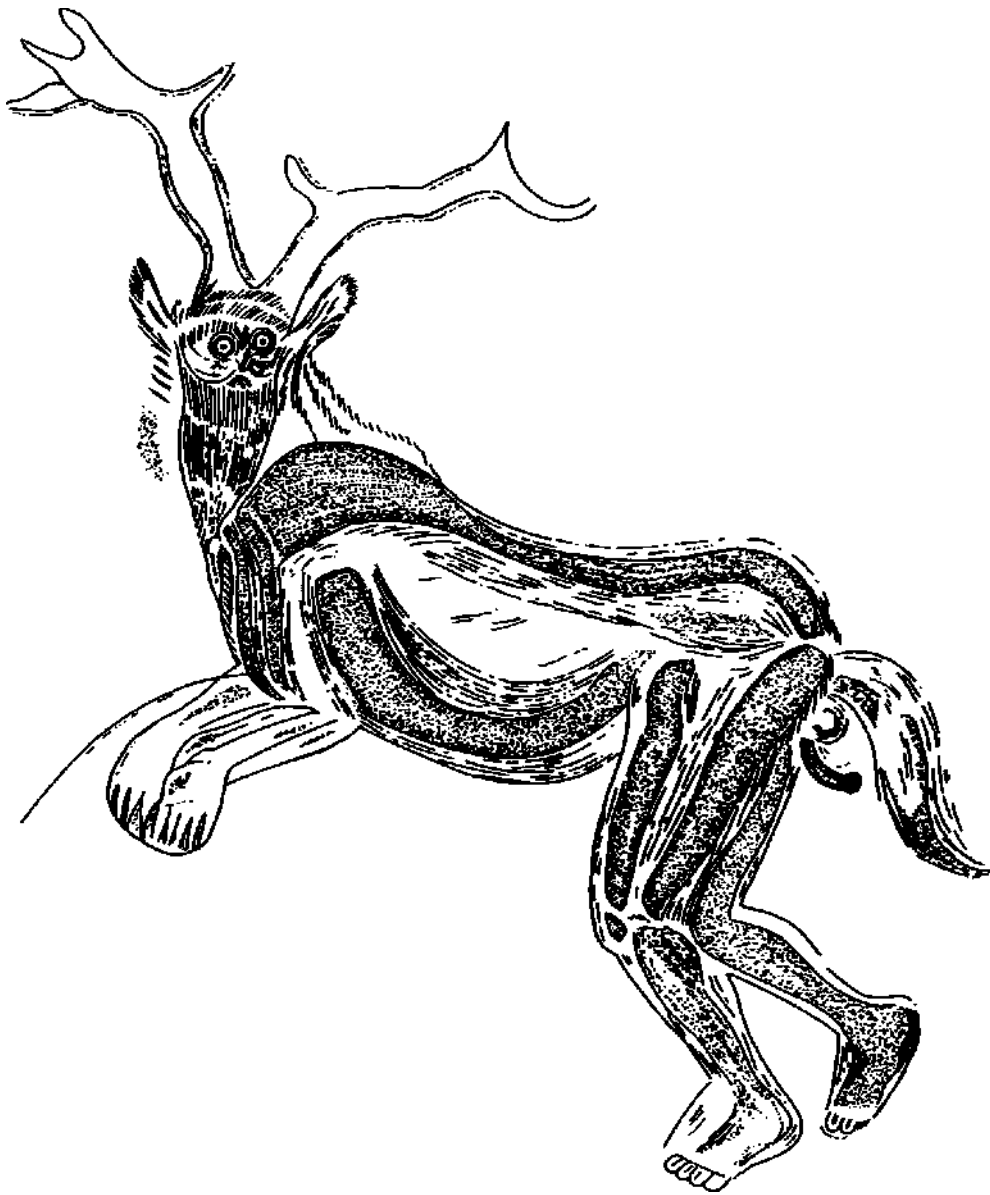


Figure 1 The 'sorcerer' of Les Trois Freres. Drawing by the Abbe Breuil (1952:166)



Figure 2 Young deer dancer from the Yaqui Pacua pueblo near Tucson, Arizona. (Photo: Richard Schechner)

Christian attitudes and practices. In African-American churches the singing, dancing, trancing, and sharing of food is a braid of entertainment and ritual. Many black entertainers began their careers in the church. African religions as well as Hinduism and Shinto integrate ritual and theatre.

GATHERING AND HUNTING CIRCUITS* CEREMONIAL CENTRES, THEATRES

The earliest human societies were gathering and hunting bands. These were neither primitive nor poor. The best evidence suggests an abundance of food, small families (birth control was practised), and an established range. Humans did not live in one spot, nor did they wander aimlessly. Each band had its own circuit, a more or less fixed route through a known time-space. I call it *time-

space' because the hunting routine was not haphazard; it took into account the movements of game, weather patterns, and geographic features. The cultural level of people by 25,000 BC as evidenced by their painting and sculpting was very high: the cave art of south-west Europe and the mobile art of Eurasia are testimony enough. In brief, humans occupied an ecological niche that kept bands on the move in regular, repetitious patterns, following game, adjusting to the seasons, creating art and ritual.

Indeed the pattern was repetitious beyond modern imagination. Certain decorated caves were in continuous use for more than ten thousand years. What kinds of use? Human bands numbered from forty to seventy individuals, occupying adjacent or overlapping ranges. For most of the year bands probably met only occasionally, by chance, or to exchange information and goods. Maybe relations between some bands were hostile. But arguing by analogy from the few gathering and hunting peoples that survive today the celebrations of the !Kung San of the Kalahari, the ceremonies of Aboriginal Australians we may infer that at special times when game was plentiful in an area, when edible roots, fruits, and nuts were ripe, a concentration of bands took place. Today as well, the farming and hunting peoples of highland Papua New Guinea stage elaborate 'payback' or exchange ceremonies on a regular basis (Rappaport 1968, Schechner 1988). Pilgrimages, potlatches, and family reunions marked by feasting and the exchange of gifts all play out the same basic pattern.

Even non-human primates engage in similar activities. Ethologists V. and F. Reynolds report that six times in the Bundongo Forest of Uganda they witnessed what the locals call a *kanjo*, or carnival, of chimpanzees:

The 'carnivals' consisted of prolonged noise for periods of hours, whereas ordinary outbursts of calling and drumming lasted a few minutes only. Although it was not possible to know the reason for this unusual behaviour, twice it seemed to be associated with the meeting at a common food source of bands that may have been relatively unfamiliar to each other.... Calls were coming from all directions at once and all groups concerned seemed to be moving about rapidly. As we oriented the source of one outburst, another came from another direction. Stamping and fast running feet were heard sometimes behind, sometimes in front and howling outbursts and prolonged rolls of drums (as many as 13 rapid beats) shaking the ground surprised us every few yards.

(1965:408-9)

The Reynolds are not sure what the 'carnivals' are for. They think they may signal a move from one food source to another *kanjos* occur when edible fruits are ripe. Might these *kanjos* be prototypes of celebratory, theatrical events? Their qualities are worth noting: (1) a meeting of bands whose members are neither totally familiar nor total strangers; (2) sharing food or, at least, a food source; (3) rhythmic movement and sound making if not yet singing, dancing and drumming at least something akin to entertainment or celebration; (4) using a place that is not 'home' for any group.

Where two or more groups assemble on schedule, where there is abundant food available, and where there is a landmark a cave, hill, waterhole, or whatever there a ceremonial centre is likely to develop (Figure 3). A key difference separating human from ape ceremonial centres is that only humans permanently transform a space by 'writing' on it or attaching a spoken lore to it. The painting and sculpting preserved in the cave art of Palaeolithic Europe (as well as of Australia, and in the more recent cave and rock art from Africa and the Americas) was a way of transforming natural spaces into cultural places, a way of making theatres. The 'writing' need not be visual; it can be oral, as with so much Aboriginal Australian lore, which transforms rocks, waterholes, and barely visible paths into repositories of narrative and performative knowledge (see Gould 1969). Or similarly, but in an environment as different as can be imagined from the Australian desert, the Mbuti of Zaire move confidently through the rainforest singing and dancing their Molimo (Turnbull 1962, 1985, 1990). The Molimo is characterized by the sound of a wooden trumpet. The trumpet-Molimo, hidden

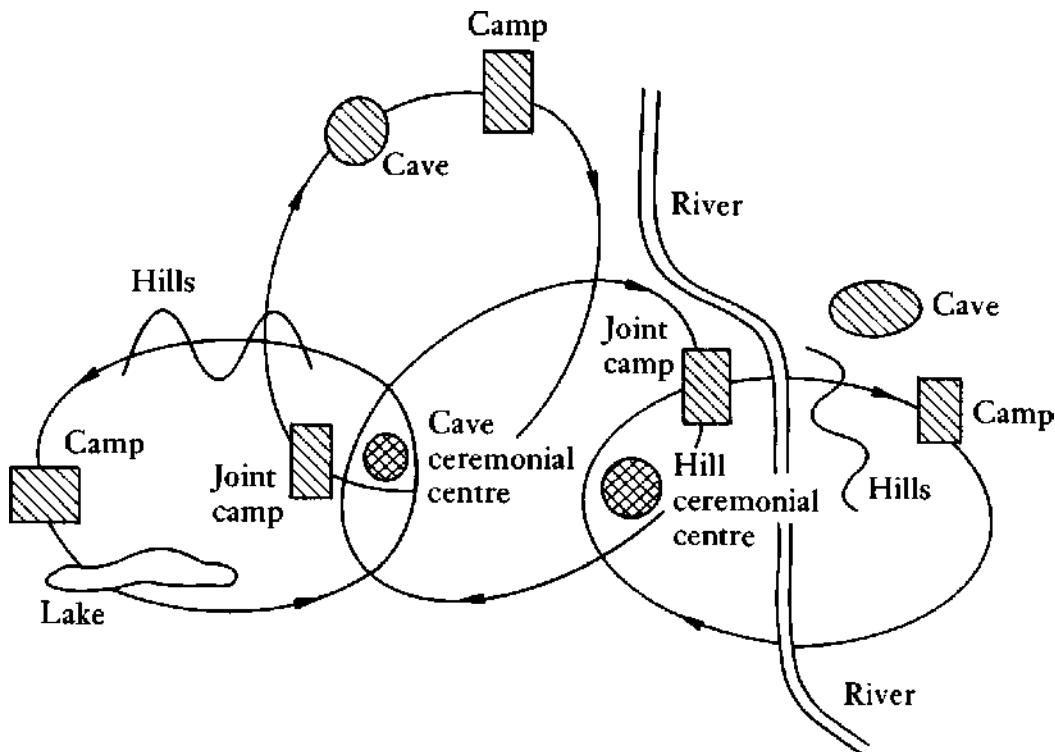


Figure 3 Schematic representation showing how camp locations, ceremonial centres and landscape features might have related to each other in the annual cycles of movement of hunter-gatherer bands during the Palaeolithic epoch. It is my contention that ceremonial centres emerge where bands regularly come close to each other at geographically significant sites such as hills, caves, river crossings, and so on. (After Schechner

vertically in a tree near the sacred centre of the forest, moves towards the camp, relocating the sacred centre as it breathes air, drinks water, is rubbed with earth, and finally manifests itself over fire. At this point the sanctity of the forest centre envelops the camp.

(Turnbull 1985:16)

The Australian and Mbuti cases teach us to be cautious about assuming that an area that contains little visual evidence of high art is necessarily artistically bereft. Music, singing, acting, storytelling, and dancing leave few traces.

Sometimes what appears to the uninitiated to be an ordinary landscape is a world fully marked and populated to those who understand it. Bruce Chatwin (1988) writes of the 'songlines' that cross Aboriginal Australia, marking the journeys of the Dreamtime Ancestors who, at the start of time and history, transformed themselves into the hills, rocks, riverbeds, trails, and other landmarks which are still visible today. Aboriginal people who are ritually educated and fully initiated can read the living geography in very precise ways both practically and mythically. The Ancestral Beings not only formed the world, they also sang and devised the first rituals:

The Ancients sang.. the rivers and ranges, salt-pans and sand dunes. They hunted, ate, made love, danced, killed: wherever their tracks led they left a trail of music. They wrapped the whole world in a web of song.

(Chatwin 1988:81-2)

From a traditional Aboriginal view, today's people ought not to disrupt the landscape, but should live in close harmony with it. As Gould has put it:

The desert Aborigines do not seek to control the environment in either their daily or their sacred lives. Rituals of the sacred life may be seen as the efforts of man *[sic]* to combine with his environment, to become 'at one' with it.

(Gould 1969:128)

We might go so far as to say that the entire landscape of Aboriginal Australia is itself a 'total work of art', a world constructed and infused with particular meanings. But this is to understand 'art' in a sense very different from that enshrined in the Western tradition, according to which it entails the conscious human transformation of 'raw' or 'natural' material in the production of 'artefacts'. From the traditional Aboriginal perspective, however, the distinction between what is natural and what is artificial does not apply; rather, the whole natural world is a reminder of the power of transformation exercised by the Dreamtime Ancestors. Aboriginal art, in so far as it is produced by living people, is thus not so much 'creative' as evocative of what is always in danger of being forgotten if it is not insistently reperformed. Lamentably, this traditional approach to the land and to performance is no longer widespread in Australia, or for that matter elsewhere. It has been overwhelmed by Western economies and power relations, and by Christian or Islamic religious ideologies.

A theatre is a place to enact not only modern artworks, but also these kinds of evocative performances. This kind of place did not arrive late in human culture, say with the Greeks, but was there at least from Palaeolithic times. The first theatres were ceremonial centres; they were not 'natural spaces' (such as Bundongo Forest where the chimpanzees carnivalled) but 'cultural places', a synthesis of humanly modified landmarks, calendrically marked time, and predictable social interactions. It is impossible to ascertain the details concerning *mise-en-scene*, dancing and acting styles, costumes, masks, music, and so on, nor can we know exactly what the functions of the performances were. More often than not theories of what went on and why suit the tastes of the reconstructor: suggestions include initiation, healing, burial rites, fertility rites, and so on. In addition to the above ideas, there is much to be said for the view of Rappaport (1968) and Kertzer (1988): that performances of ritual regulate or even create economic, political and religious relations among peoples who are ambivalent about each other. As Rappaport puts it, 'ritual, particularly in the context of a ritual cycle, operates as a regulating mechanism in a system, or set of interlocking systems' (1968:4).

Extrapolating from the evidence and opinions at hand, the performances at ceremonial centres functioned in at least the following ways: (1) to create or maintain friendly relations; (2) to exchange goods, food, mates, techniques; (3) to show, enjoy, and exchange dances, songs, stories. These meetings followed an obvious but important overall pattern beginning with the gathering of the groups, followed by specific performances, exchanges of goods and information and the sharing of food, and ending with the dispersal of the participants. People came to a special place, did something that could only be done at that place, something that could be called 'theatre' (and/or 'dance and music') and went on their separate ways. Simple and obvious as this constellation of events may seem to be, they are not inevitable when two or more groups approach each other. The groups could avoid each other, meet in combat, or give greeting and pass by as travellers do on a road. The pattern of gathering, performing, and dispersing is a specifically theatrical one.

HUNTING, RITUAL, PLAYING, AND PERFORMANCE

The 'dramatic' behaviour of groups assembled at ceremonial centres is based more on hunting than on gathering. Hunting is inherently dramatic. A script, not written but well known, sketches out what is supposed to happen: hunters follow agreed strategies designed to culminate in a successful confrontation; the slaughter of an animal is followed by the distribution of meat, cooking, and feasting. The behaviours involved are both agonistic (towards the prey) and co-operative (among the hunters). Signals during the hunt often include deceptive animal-like sounds; sometimes costumes are worn as camouflage or as a magical imitation of the prey. After a successful kill, there is much dancing and feasting

as the meat is shared according to particular rules. The feast is followed by total relaxation.

Often, as among the deer-hunting Yaquis of Mexico and Arizona, the prey is thought to give itself willingly to the hunters. The meal following a successful hunt is a communion; sharing the flesh of the kill is a way of acquiring the slaughtered animal's particular powers and genius, as well as of affirming the solidarity of the group eating the meat. Yet we should be wary in our interpretations of such practices. It is all too easy for the interpreter to fall into the trap of attributing some meaning to an event that, in fact, belongs to the interpreter's own deeply held prior narratives. Thus both the view that the confrontation between hunters and prey is violent and agonistic (the dramatic model), and the alternative view which claims a mutuality in the relationship between hunters and prey (the willing sacrifice model), are versions of two strong founding myths of the Western tradition. The violent story is a retelling of humankind's supposedly bloodthirsty carnivorous past ('red in tooth and claw'), while the story of willing surrender leading to a communion of flesh and blood is, of course, the Christ tale.

Hunting demands not only co-operation but also sudden bursts of energy, climaxes balanced against extended periods of stealth and waiting. Besides, it needs a great deal of practice, of learning from more experienced hunters. This is where play comes in – especially creative or 'free play'. One of the qualities of play in higher primates, as observed in the wild, is its balance between improvisation and rule-governed behaviour. In fact, playing is the improvisational imposition of order on events. And where play is not autistic it involves playmates. Although play prepares young novices for more than hunting, hunting is a particularly full use of what play teaches. The most difficult hunts are those where the prey is intelligent and strong. To be successful on such hunts, plans have to be made; the present moment is conditioned by what is presumed to be coming next on the basis both of a knowledge of what happened on previous hunts and of the wisdom of lore. What develops is a game involving the hunters, the prey, and the environment; a game based on past experience told, retold, and learned. Thus not only is hunting itself dramatic: the way young hunters learn is also by not-for-real practice (rehearsal), apprenticeship, and listening to more skilled hunters tell stories (narrative).

Playing is a way not only to learn but also to manage energy. Energy is spent on fighting, mating, determining and keeping hierarchy, defining and defending turf, and hunting. Crises arise sporadically, but when they do, the animal that cannot swiftly mobilize high energy is doomed. Decisively, play allows kinetic potential to be maintained not by being stored but by being spent; and when such energy is spent in playing, the experience is fun. When a crisis arises, an animal is able to meet it by switching play energy into fight energy or hunting energy, for example, and to enjoy doing so. Hunting is a kind of playing-for-real that is strategic, future-and-crisis-oriented, violent and

agonistic. It has winners and losers, leaders and followers; it uses costumes and disguises; it has a beginning, middle, and end. Its underlying themes are fertility-replenishment, strength, prowess and leadership. Hunting emphasizes individual or small-group action and teamwork. Transforming hunting or playing-at-hunting into theatre may be a function of what ethologists call 'displacement activity': when two or more conflicting impulses prevent each other from being activated, a different, seemingly unrelated action is performed. So, for example, when members of certain species dare not fight a stronger adversary and cannot flee, they begin intense self-preening. In humans, the conflicting impulses may be the wish to 'hunt' people as against bonds to members of one's own community. The displacement activity is a ritual performance in which humans kill humans, but only in play, 'for fun', or as a sacrifice (see below, pp. 634–5). Or instead of being hunted, loved ones are circumcised, painted, tattooed, scarred, or otherwise marked with signs written upon the body. Through the ordeal of being temporary prey-in-play, the initiated, the sacrificed, or the performer gains the status of the hunter-hunted.

EFFICACY AND ENTERTAINMENT

The relationship between ritual and theatre takes the form of an interplay between efficacy and entertainment. This relationship is both thematic and historical. Efficacy and entertainment are not opposed to each other; rather they form the poles of a continuum:

<i>Entertainment</i>	<i>Efficacy</i>
Theatre	Ritual
fun	results
for those here now	for a divine Other
performer displays learned skills	performer possessed, in trance
individual creativity	collective creativity
audience watches	audience participates
audience appreciates	audience believes
criticism flourishes	criticism discouraged

Whether a specific performance is 'ritual' or 'theatre' depends mostly on context and function. A performance is called theatre or ritual because of where it is performed, by whom, and under what circumstances. If the performance's purpose is to effect transformations, to heal, or to appease or appeal to transcendent Others (gods, ancestors, divine royalty, etc.) to get 'results' then the qualities listed under the heading 'efficacy' will most probably prevail and the performance may be regarded as a ritual. Conversely, if the qualities listed under 'entertainment' prevail, it may be regarded as theatre. No performance, however, is pure efficacy or pure entertainment.

The matter is complex because one can look at specific performances from

several vantage points, and to change perspectives is also to change one's characterization of the event. For example, a Broadway musical is entertainment if one concentrates on what happens on stage and in the house. But if the point of view is extended to include rehearsals, backstage activities before, during, and after the show, the function of the roles in the lives of each performer, the money invested by the backers, how the audience arrives and settles in, the reasons spectators are attending (as critics, fun-seekers, or companions), how they obtained their tickets (given by management, purchased as individuals, on expense accounts, as members of a theatre party) and how all this information indicates the use each is making of the performance (as entertainment, as a means to advance careers, as a profit-making enterprise, as a donation), then even a Broadway musical is more than entertainment, it is also ritual, economics, and a microcosm of social structure and process.

In the 1960s and 1970s in the West, artists began to open the theatre-making process to the public. At first this was as simple as showing lighting instruments or doing away with the front curtain (as Brecht urged). But from about 1965 experimenters began to show workshops, rehearsals, and other previously hidden or unconscious procedures. Environmental theatre staging and audience participation became more common (see Schechner 1973). These processual elements of theatre were made problematic, subject to active inquiry. The procedures concerned have to do with the theatre-in-itself; they are, as regards the theatre, efficacious: that is, they are what makes theatre 'theatre', regardless of story, characterization or other 'elements of drama'. Theatre makers discovered reflexivity even as they discarded (temporarily) narrativity. The story of 'how this performance is being made' replaced the story the play would ordinarily have told. This self-referencing, reflexive mode of performing is an example of what Gregory Bateson called 'metacommunication'—signals whose 'subject of discourse is the relationship between the speakers' (Bateson 1972:178). Theatre's reflexive phase signalled loudly that spectators were to be included as 'speakers' in the theatrical event. Thus it was natural that reflexivity in theatre went hand in hand with audience participation.

Along with the attention paid to the theatrical process, the role of the actor redefined and expanded as 'performer' underwent a similarly deep examination. Led by Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook, Joseph Chaikin, Eugenio Barba and others, the actor was no longer seen as the mouthpiece of the author working under the guidance (if not complete control) of the director, but as a quasi-shaman, a person of power who could express his or her own feelings, interrogate the author's text and the audience, and serve as a conduit for energies liberated by the theatrical event. These energies do not emanate from written texts but are what Robert Plant Armstrong (writing about Africa) called the 'powers of presence' (1981): alive only in the immediacy of performance. Previously impervious walls separating the genres of music, theatre and dance began to crack. Dancers found their voices, actors mastered difficult

movements and vocal techniques, musicians especially pop musicians displayed extraordinary *mise-en-scenic* virtuosity

All this attention paid to the process of theatre-making and to the powers of the performer was a way of ritualizing performance, of making theatre efficacious. In a period when authenticity was, and is, difficult to define, when public life has been theatricalized, the performer was asked to doff his or her traditional masks to be not an agent of 'playing' or 'fooling' or 'lying' (public masquerades) but one who 'tells the truth'. If not this, then at least she or he should show how the masks are put on and taken off perhaps in that way educating the public to the theatricalized deceptions practised on them by political leaders and media dons. Instead of mirroring the age, performers were asked to remedy it. The professions taken as models (and frequently enough cited by Grotowski and others) included the priesthood and medicine. No wonder shamanism became so popular: it is that branch of doctoring that is religious, and at the same time the kind of religion that is theatrical.

In the 1960s and 1970s (in the West and in Western-influenced theatre) efficacy usurped the once dominant position of entertainment. Although the 1980s and 1990s have seen an apparent return to the dominance of entertainment, this is not so in reality. First, certain procedures advanced in the 1960s have become commonplace: performance events are routinely staged in 'untheatres', the preparation and 'process' phases of performance are displayed, very personal material is integrated into or shown side by side with public and fictional materials, and so forth. Second, many performance artists, as well as practitioners of 'third' or 'alternative' or 'new age' theatre, draw directly on shamanic techniques while involving themselves in creating community celebrations or other ritually efficacious events. Paratheatrical events dissolve the audience-performer dichotomy, while a whole branch of performance aims at eliminating the dichotomy between 'art' and 'life' (Kaprow 1983). Finally, there has been a sea-change in the perception of what is 'theatrical'¹ so that political action, conflictual or disharmonic behaviour on both the personal and the 'social drama' levels, role-playing in everyday life, job training using acting exercises and theatrical simulations all attest to the increasingly complicated interactions between, and continuing convergence of, theatre and ritual.

Figure 4 shows how the history of Western theatre can be given overall shape as a fluctuating relation between efficacy-ritual and entertainment-theatre. This model can be applied to any culture. During each historical period in every culture either entertainment or efficacy is dominant; but the situation is never static: one rises while the other declines. The changes in the relationship between entertainment and efficacy are part of the overall pattern of social change. Performance is more than a mirror of social change, however; it participates in the complex process that *creates* change. For Western theatre, at least, in periods when efficacy and entertainment were both present in nearly equal degrees, theatre flourished. During these relatively brief historical

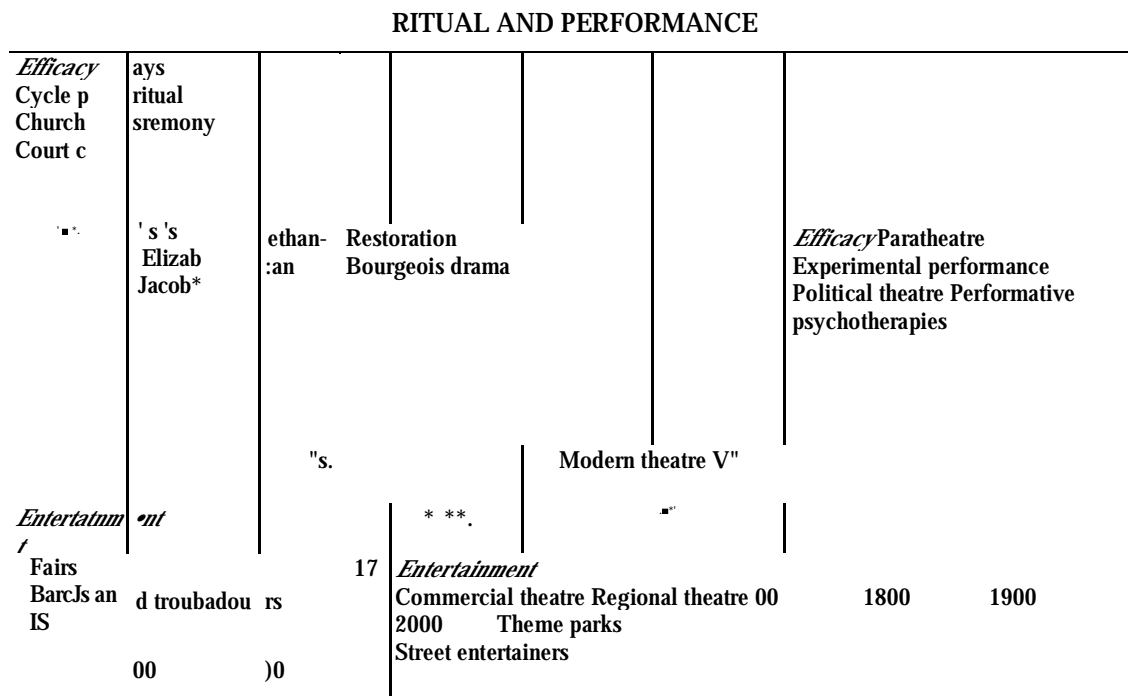


Figure 4 The fluctuating relationship between efficacy and entertainment over time, as exemplified in Western theatre and drama. (After Schechner 1988:122)

moments the theatre answers needs that are ritualistic as well as pleasure-giving. Both the Athenian theatre of the fifth century BC and that of Elizabethan England show this kind of convergence. In the twelfth century, Honorius of Autun wrote:

It is known that those who recited tragedies in theatres presented the actions of opponents by gestures before the people. In the same way our tragic author [i.e. the celebrant] represents by his gestures in the theatre of the Church before the Christian people the struggle of Christ and teaches to them the victory of his redemption. [Honorius then compares each movement of the Mass to an equivalent movement of tragic drama.] When the sacrifice has been completed, peace and Communion are given by the celebrant to the people.... Then by the *Ite, missa est*, they are ordered to return to their homes with rejoicing. They shout *Deo gratias* and return home rejoicing.

{Quoted in Hardison 1965:39-40}

What is extraordinary about Honorius's description is that it is a medieval view, not a backward glance by a modern. Yet Honorius's Mass is familiar to those who have attended avant-garde performances. The medieval Mass used many avant-garde techniques or, more to the point, experimental theatre uses many techniques drawn from ritual. The medieval Mass was allegorical and stylized rather than naturalistic; it encouraged, even forced, audience participation; it treated time ideologically; it integrated drama, dance, and music; it extended the spatial field of the performance from the church to the roadways to the homes of the congregants. Yet for all this, the Mass was more of a ritual than an entertainment. Why? Because its whole point was efficacy. As Hardison

comments, 'the service...has a very important aesthetic dimension, but it is essentially not a matter of appreciation but of passionate affirmation'¹ (1965:77). The Mass was a closed circle embracing the congregation and those officiating, leaving no room for appreciators. Because of its hold on the congregation, and its guarantee of efficacy, the Mass was not theatre in either the classical or the modern sense.

Theatre comes into existence when attendance is voluntary, allowing enough distance to open between spectators and the performers for the former to pass judgement on the latter. The paradigmatic theatrical situation is a group of performers soliciting an audience who may or may not attend. If they dislike what they see, spectators may express their dissatisfaction. And if they stay away, or boo, it is the theatre that suffers, not its audience. In ritual, staying away means rejecting the congregation or being rejected by it (or excommunicated). If only a few are absent, it is they who suffer, but if many stay away the congregation and the community it represents is faced with dissolution or schism. Or, to put it another way, the participants in ritual depend on it, while theatre depends on its participants. But the differences are not cut-and-dried. The relationship between performers, spectators, and performance, like that between entertainment and efficacy, is dynamic, moulded by specific social, cultural, and historical developments.

SOCIAL DRAMA/AESTHETIC DRAMA

Victor Turner (1974:23-59) located 'four main phases of public action', which constitute 'the diachronic profile of social drama': (1) breach, (2) crisis, (3) redressive action, and (4) reintegration or schism. A breach is a violation of 'norm-governed social relations' within a family, work group, village, nation, or set of nations. A crisis is a widening of the breach until 'it becomes coextensive with some dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which the conflicting or antagonistic parties belong. It is now fashionable to speak of this sort of thing as the "escalation" of crisis'. A crisis is a situation that cannot be overlooked, that must be dealt with here and now. Redressive action is what is done to resolve the crisis, to end the conflict. This 'may range from personal advice and informal mediation or arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery, and, to resolve certain kinds of crises or legitimate other modes of resolution, to the performance of public ritual'. Reintegration is the elimination of the breach that engendered the crisis. If, however, reintegration is not possible, either the problem will fester or there will be a schism. This schism can be creative, as when dissident groups or individuals set out for themselves whether physically or conceptually to found new settlements, religions, art movements, or whatever. Turner's model can be applied just as well to two classes of event sequences: social happenings and aesthetic dramas. This comes as no surprise, for Turner derived his processual or dramaturgical model from what he knew about aesthetic drama (as well as drawing on the

thought of Max Gluckman, Kenneth Burke, Erving Goffman, and Milton Singer).

Social dramas are always happening. They occur in humdrum ordinary life divorces, tensions between parents and children, and dozens of other quotidian crises and they occur as highly publicized 'historical moments', splashed all over the media to be relished by reader-spectators. An historical moment that also figured as social drama was the firing in November 1975 of several cabinet members by U.S. President Gerald Ford in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal. The breach was the fact that Ford was not an elected president he was appointed by Richard Nixon after Vice-President Spiro Agnew resigned; later Nixon himself resigned. Ford inherited a number of Nixon-Agnew cabinet people. Thus Ford was forced to defend policies he did not originate as well as to bear the stigma of a disgraced administration. At the same time Ford wished to seek the presidency on his own account in 1976. The crisis was the disclosure that American agents planned to assassinate foreign heads of state, and that they had been tapping the phones of many Americans as part of a widespread secret-police apparatus whose operations mushroomed under Nixon. Moreover there was a growing feeling in the nation that Ford was stupid and indecisive (it was commonly joked that he could not walk and chew gum at the same time). The redressive action, as described in the *New York Times* of Monday, 3 November 1975, was typically dramatic (as well as introducing into the White House a person still prominent on the national stage):

President Ford has dismissed Secretary of Defence James R. Schlesinger and William E. Colby, Director of Central Intelligence, in a major shuffling of his top national security posts. Administration officials said that the President had also asked Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger to relinquish his post as national security adviser in the White House, but to stay on as head of the State Department. White House officials said that Mr Schlesinger would probably be replaced by the White House chief of staff, Donald H. Rumsfeld, and that Mr Colby's likely successor would be George Bush, the present head of the American liaison office in China.

This redressive action did not end the crisis, but generated further developments ('one thing leads to another'). Vice-President Nelson Rockefeller told Ford he would not stand for the vice-presidency in 1976 meaning he was fired by Ford or preparing to challenge the President for the Republican nomination. Finally, the Secretary of Commerce resigned and was replaced by Elliott Richardson, the one person from the Nixon administration whose reputation was not only untarnished but enhanced. The reintegration phase of this social drama took some time as Ford established 'his own' government in preparation for the 1976 elections (which he lost to Jimmy Carter).

In Turner's four-phase scheme, while the breach may fester for a long time, the critical action can erupt suddenly, unpredictably, because a precipitating event is often the 'straw that broke the camel's back'. Once entrained, redressive actions may continue for a long time and reintegration is not certain.

But once a social drama is over, analysts can look back and see what happened, detecting an orderly development of events congruent with Turner's scheme for, as Sartre once noted, death transforms every life into a destiny. But in the midst of events, things appear to happen suddenly, even haphazardly.

Let us now apply Turner's model to an aesthetic drama, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The breach is the long-standing feud between Montagues and Capulets. The crisis is Romeo and Juliet falling in love with each other at first sight. Romeo recognizes the crisis at once—having kissed Juliet and finding out who she is, he exclaims, 'Is she a Capulet?/O dear account! my life is my foe's debt' (I, v, 22-23). Juliet is equally aware, 'My only love sprung from my only hate!' (I, v, 142). Most of the rest of the play is taken up by the burgeoning crisis met by increasingly dangerous redressive actions. Shakespeare brilliantly counterpoints each note of love against the increasing pressure of discovery and catastrophe. The danger becomes critical when Romeo kills Tybalt, a prominent Capulet. Friar Laurence's plan to get the young lovers out of Verona is classic schismogenesis: the founding of a new social unit in a new place in order to avoid or end conflict. Laurence knows that when Juliet is presumed dead her suit with Paris is ended; after she is buried with the other Capulets, Romeo can carry her to Mantua where there is nothing keeping a Montague from marrying a Capulet. But this is not to be. Throughout the redressive action phase the tension heightens between the lovers' passion for each other and their families' hatred. The action of the play is strung like a tightrope connecting two opposite but identical poles: love and hate. Everyone in the play passionately loves or hates and everyone must take sides, as Laurence does with the lovers, the Nurse with the parents. The play ends in tragedy—but a tragedy teetering on farce as Juliet's false death provokes Romeo to his real one, which precipitates Juliet's.

In all tragedy and many farces (the genre closest to tragedy) redressive action fails to offer the heroes a way out: they end up dead, maimed, and/or exiled separated from the community but also sacrificed on behalf of the community. Sacrifice is the ritual foundation of tragedy, the necessary prelude to reintegration. At the tomb of their children, Capulet and Montague end their feud; Oedipus's exile heals the Theban plague. It is a depressing drama that does not knit up the unravelled social order. That kind of theatre we know from Samuel Beckett (he was not the first, remember Euripides and Buchner). *Waiting for Godot* is all redressive action; Gogo and Didi have forgotten what (if any) breach and crisis brought them to the appointed place to wait. Painfully yet ludicrously there is no crisis, though one is desired. Reintegration or schism (Godot arriving, their leaving) are out of the question.

What comparisons can be made between President Ford's cabinet shakeup and *Romeo and Juliet*? The hidden structure of the one is the visible structure of the other—not in terms of a plot, but in terms of the underlying rhythm and flow of causation. Figure 5 models the relation of dynamic positive feedback whereby social dramas affect aesthetic dramas, and vice versa. What Ford and

his advisers wished to keep quiet until the 'right' moment, Shakespeare divulges for the delectation of his audience. The world of drama reveals intimate talk and interactions; the world of politics conceals and manipulates events. In *Richard III*, Shakespeare depicts this very duplicity. The visible actions of a given social drama are informed, shaped, conditioned, and guided by the aesthetic principles and specific theatrical-cum-rhetorical devices of the culture depicted. Reciprocally, a culture's visible aesthetic theatre is informed, shaped, conditioned, and guided by that culture's processes of social interaction. This is an interactive theory, not a mimetic one. Aesthetics and social life interact, as depicted in Figure 5. Politicians, lobbyists, militants, terrorists, doctors, lawyers, teachers, whether acting individually or in a group, use theatrical techniques (staging, characterization, scenography, manipulation of reception) to create and manage social events — actions that are consequential, 'real', designed to change the social order or maintain the status quo, to change a person's life or maintain it. The theatre artist uses the consequential actions of social life as the underlying themes, frames, and rhythms of his or her art. Ritual performance, occupying as it does the middle ground between aesthetic drama and social drama, is especially powerful because it equivocates, refusing to be solely aesthetic (for looking only) or social (wholly committed to action now); rituals participate both in the aesthetic and the social, drawing their power from both and operating within both.

Turner very much liked the 'infinity loop' model shown in Figure 5. He used the loop in two essays elaborating his theories of social drama (1982:61-88; 1990:8-18):

Notice that the *manifest* social drama feeds into the latent realm of stage drama; its characteristic form in a given culture, at a given time and place, unconsciously, or perhaps preconsciously, influences not only the form but also the content of the stage drama of which it is the active or 'magic' mirror. The stage drama, when it is meant to do more than entertain — though entertainment is always one of its vital aims — is a metacommentary, explicit or implicit, witting or unwitting, on the major social dramas of its social context (wars, revolutions, scandals, institutional changes). Not only that, but its message and its rhetoric feed back into the *latent* processual structure of the social drama and partly account for its ready ritualization. Life itself now becomes a mirror held up to art, and the living now *perform* their lives, for the protagonists of a social drama, a 'drama of living', have been equipped by aesthetic drama with some of their most salient opinions, imageries, tropes, and ideological perspectives. Neither mutual mirroring, life by art, art by life, is exact, for each is not a planar mirror but a matricial mirror; at each exchange something new is added and something old is lost or discarded. Human beings learn through experience, though all too often they repress painful experience, and perhaps the deepest experience is through drama; not through social drama, or stage drama (or its equivalent) alone but in the circulatory or oscillatory process of their mutual and incessant modification.

(Turner 1990:16-17)

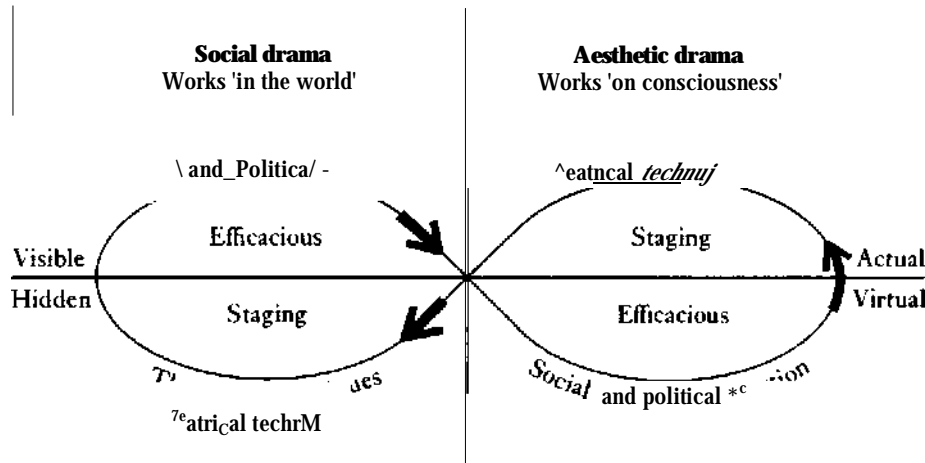


Figure 5 Infinity loop model of the relation between social drama and aesthetic drama.
(After Schechner 1988:190)

To return now to President Ford and *Romeo and Juliet*. Ford's actions were guided by a well-worked-out scenario. At both the conscious and non-conscious level, the President's stage directors planned a phased release of information designed to dramatize Ford as a man of determination, will, strength, purpose, and independence: all qualities expected of a president by Americans. But bumbling Gerry Ford blundered in his social drama (and lost himself the election). This failure was clearly expressed in theatrical terms by the *New York Times* of 4 November 1975:

The strategy behind Vice President Rockefeller's withdrawal, the dismissal of Defence Secretary James R. Schlesinger and other possible moves yet to come is to put a distinct Ford imprimatur on his Administration's domestic and foreign policies, Administration sources said today.... But this carefully planned scenario went awry yesterday when the dismissals and switches were leaked prematurely to the press.... The leaks gave off highly undesirable and conflicting signals.

Thus what was supposed to show a deft handling of state affairs did the opposite, and the President's 'image' his theatrical character suffered.

If aesthetics underlies the script Ford's scenarists composed (but were unable to carry off), politics underlies *Romeo and Juliet*. By making Romeo a Montague and Juliet a Capulet, i.e. members of Verona's leading families, Shakespeare ensures that the young lovers' fate is entwined with the city's core social life. If the lovers were commoners, as in *West Side Story* (the musical based on *Romeo and Juliet*), their plight would be as moving but the effect on the *polls* less strong. Shakespeare's story is richer for being played out against and within the war of their parents a war that affects everyone in Verona. Shakespeare, like the Greek tragedians and the masters of Japanese *kabuki* theatre, knows how to deploy his dramas of persons in fields of state events. Like a spider's web, what touches one spot vibrates the whole. *West Side Story* similarly embodies its social milieu with its democratizing myths. The field of

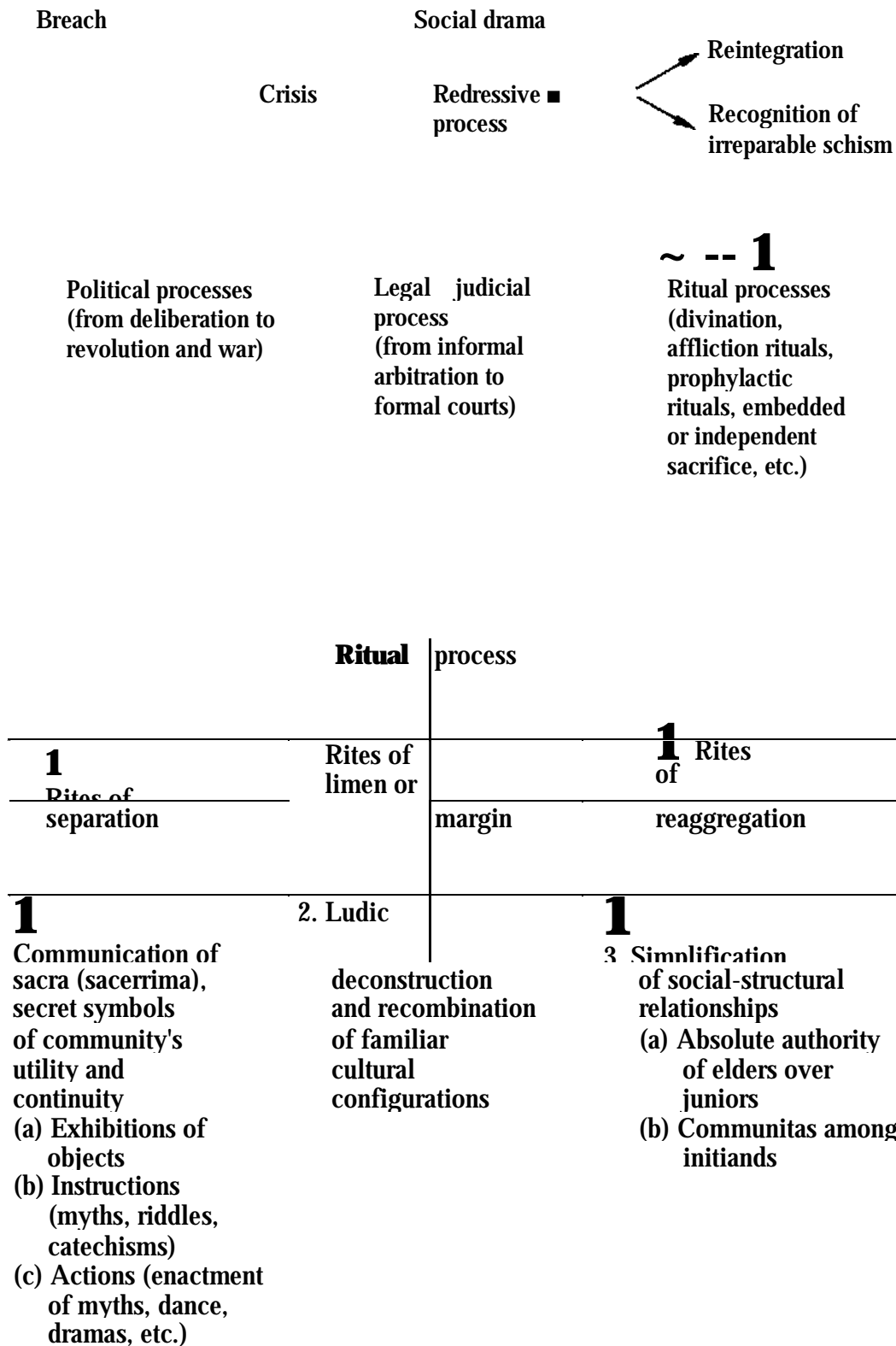


Figure 6 The relationship between social drama and ritual process. {From Turner 1986:293; reprinted by permission of the University of Arizona Press)

play for both President Ford and Shakespeare is not some abstract legendary community but this or that particular *polis*, tense with contending classes and castes, conflicting interests and rivalries. The Ford drama relates to Shakespeare's at another level, too. The President's handlers used theatrical techniques ranging from how to stage the release of news to how Ford should make up his face, wear his costume, speak his script. Their failure was not of intent but of their abilities as theatre directors. Ford's failure, however, was as a performer.

Turner, on whose ideas I am building, did not believe that aesthetic drama derived from or was a model of the whole social drama scheme:

The world of theatre, as we know it both in Asia and in America, and the immense variety of theatrical sub-genres, derive not from imitation, conscious or unconscious, of the processual form of the complete or 'satiated' social drama breach, crisis, redress, reintegration, or schisms but specifically from its third phase, the one I call redress, especially from redress as *ritual*/process [see Figure 6].... The third, redressive phase, the reflexive phase, [is] the phase where society pulls meaning from that tangle of action, and, therefore, these performances are infinitely varied, like the result of passing light through a prism. The alternative versions of meaning that complex societies produce are innumerable. Within societies there are different classes, ethnicities, regions, neighbourhoods, and people of different ages and sexes, and they each produce versions which try painfully to assign meaning to the particular crisis pattern of their own society. Each performance becomes a record, a means of explanation. Finally, it should be noted that the interrelation of social drama to stage drama is not in an endless, cyclical, repetitive pattern; it is a spiralling one. The spiralling process is responsive to inventions and the changes in the mode of production in the given society. Individuals can make an enormous impact on the sensibility and understanding of members of society.

{1990:9-11, 17)

Turner is proposing an evolutionary scheme; I am using the social-drama-aesthetic-drama model structurally.

SACRIFICE AND VIOLENCE

Rituals integrate music, dance and theatre. They use colourful and evocative masks and costumes. The processions, circumambulations, singing, dancing, storytelling, food-sharing, fire-burning, incensing, drumming, and bell-ringing along with the body heat and active participation of the crowd create an overwhelming synaesthetic environment and experience. At the same time, rituals embody values that instruct and mobilize participants. These embodied values are rhythmic and cognitive, spatial and conceptual, sensuous and ideological. In terms of brain function, ritual excites both the right and left hemispheres of the cerebral cortex, releasing pleasure-giving endorphins into the blood. Marx's aphorism, 'religion is the opium of the people'¹, may be

literally true. People are more than 'susceptible' to rituals of all kinds religious, political, sportive, aesthetic; they need the kind of satisfaction only ritual performances can provide, a powerful kind of total theatre.

But why violence? Dramatic narratives, theatrical actions, and religious myths and enactments are so often, and in so many diverse cultures, explicitly violent. At the start of the Western 'great tradition' Queen Clytemnestra murders King Agamemnon (after he has sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia), Agave dismembers her son, Pentheus, and Oedipus kills his father in a rage and then, decades later, when he discovers whom he has murdered, and who his wife is, he rips out his own eyes. Christianity is founded on the torture of crucifixion and propagated by the stories of many martyred saints. Hindu mythology is full of wars and bloodthirsty demons. Even Buddhism in its Tibetan and Sri Lankan versions includes the most horrific demons and violent exorcisms. The core drama of shamanism in Asia and the Americas is a perilous journey climaxing in a life-and-death struggle of the shaman against powerful adversaries. Shia Muslims re-enact and mourn with extreme and bloody self-wounding the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. Examples of the conjunction of belief and violence can be multiplied endlessly from every corner of the earth. The English Renaissance's most celebrated dramas feature slaughters such as the one that ends *Hamlet*, gratuitous horrors such as the blinding of Gloucester in *King Lear*, or the multiple atrocities characteristic of Jacobean theatre. The modern repertory is also full of murders, suicides, torture, and 'psychological violence', as even a cursory reading of Ibsen, Strindberg, Pirandello, Brecht, O'Neill, Genet, Shepard, and Churchill shows. The avant-garde, too, seems to delight in assaults on the body, from Chris Burden's famous shootings to Stelarc's suspensions by means of hooks inserted into his flesh. Rituals around the world abound with cutting, scarring, and other painful markings. Farce and popular entertainments, too, from pornography to Grand Guignol, from demolition Derbies to wrestling and horror movies, indulge in chaotic, erotic violence. Violence is endemic to both ritual and aesthetic theatre.

Rene Girard, in his *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), offers one possible explanation. Girard argues that real violence always threatens the social life of a group:

Inevitably the moment comes when violence can only be countered by more violence. Whether we fail or succeed in our effort to subdue it, the real victor is always violence itself. The mimetic attributes of violence are extraordinary sometimes direct and positive, at other times indirect and negative. The more men strive to curb their violent impulses, the more these impulses seem to prosper.

(1977:31)

Girard goes on to link violence to sexuality:

Like violence, sexual desire tends to fasten upon surrogate objects if the object to which it was originally attracted remains inaccessible; it willingly accepts

substitutes. And again, like violence, repressed sexual desire accumulates energy that sooner or later bursts forth, causing tremendous havoc. It is also worth noting that the shift from violence to sexuality and from sexuality to violence is easily affected, even by the most 'normal' of individuals, totally lacking in perversion. Thwarted sexuality leads naturally to violence, just as lovers' quarrels often end in an amorous embrace.

(1977:35)

Girard believes (and I agree) that ritual sublimates violence: 'The function of ritual is to "purify" violence; that is to "trick" violence into spending itself on victims whose death will provoke no reprisals' (1977:36). All this sounds very much like theatre especially a theatre whose function is cathartic, a theatre that 'redirects' violent and erotic energies. Cathartic or not, theatre always manufactures substitutes, specializing in multiplying alternatives. Is it accidental that so many of these alternatives combine the violent with the erotic?

The 'sacrificial crisis', as Girard sees it, lies in the dissolution of distinctions within a society from the erasure of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities of parents towards their children, to the elision of hierarchy. Incest and regicide are radical attacks on differentiation. Girard asserts: 'Wherever differences are lacking, violence threatens' (1977:57). The enactment of ritual death whether the victim is actually or theatrically killed restores distinctions by emphasizing the difference between the victim and the rest of society:

The surrogate victim plays the same role on the collective level as the objects the shamans claim to extract from their patients play on the individual level objects that are then identified as the cause of the illness.

(1977:83)

In theatre the substitutions are more complex than in shamanism, for here the actor is a substitute for a surrogate. The actor who plays Pentheus, Oedipus, Lear, or Willie Loman is not that 'character', which itself is not a 'real person'. There may be no 'real person' at all behind the scenes, but only the play of embodied representations, thus:

[victim] character actor :: audience society

At the place where the actor meets the audience that is, in the theatre society faces the sacrificial victim thrice-removed. The audience itself is once-removed from the society which it is part of and represents. Individuals 'leave' society and 'go to' the theatre where they respond to the performance more as a group than as discrete individuals. The social role that spectators play is analogous to the character roles that actors play. At least one of the characters stands in for the sacrificial victim. Thus an actor playing such a character is performing a representation of a representation. In ritual performances two representations are stripped away: there is neither character nor audience. In ritual the encounter is:

[victim] actor :: society

Or, if a real sacrifice is performed:

victim:: society

A priest performing the Eucharist 'stands for'¹ or 'elevates' Christ while the congregants are Christendom itself. The 'actor :: audience' interface is looser, more given to playfulness, change, and individual creativity than the 'actor :: society' interface. When the victim faces society directly, the actual sacrifice that takes place is usually not of a life. It may be a cutting or scarring or tattooing; or an immersion, the exchange of rings, the giving of a thread or some other painless but irrevocable act. Can an initiate or a bride and groom be regarded as 'victims'? Surely they can, for the shadow of a sacrificial victim lies behind even the most celebratory of ritual actions.

There are ways other than Girard's to explain the apparently universal association of violence, sexuality, ritual and theatre. In *Totem and Taboo* (1962 [1913]) Freud proposed an analogy between the thought of animists, neurotics, children, and artists:

It is easy to perceive the motives which lead men to practise magic: they are human wishes. All we need to suppose is that primitive man had an immense belief in the power of his wishes.

Children are in an analogous psychical situation.... They satisfy their wishes in an hallucinatory manner, that is, they create a satisfying situation by means of centrifugal excitation of their sense organs. An adult primitive man has an alternative method open to him. His wishes are accompanied by a motor impulse, the will, which is later destined to alter the whole face of the earth in order to satisfy his wishes. This motor impulse is at first employed to give a representation of the satisfying situation in such a way that it becomes possible to experience the satisfaction by means of what might be described as motor hallucinations. This kind of representation of a satisfied wish is quite comparable to children's play, which succeeds their earlier purely sensory technique of satisfaction.

(1962:83-4)

This 'omnipotence of thoughts', as Freud called it, makes a world where 'things become less important than ideas of things' (p. 85). Freud believed that neurotics also live in this 'world apart', where 'they are only affected by what is thought with intensity and pictured with emotion, whereas agreement with external reality is a matter of no importance' (p. 86). Freud noted that neurotics undergoing psychoanalysis are 'unable to believe that thoughts are free and will constantly be afraid of expressing evil wishes, as though their expression would lead inevitably to their fulfilment'. In this way, neurotics reveal their 'resemblance to the savages who believe they can alter the external world by mere thinking' (p. 87). Freud, like many of his contemporaries, thought that

artists were more like children, neurotics or 'savages' than they were like 'responsible' (male) adults.

Freud was also a cultural evolutionist. He argued for a progression from an animist view of the world to a religious view, and thence to a scientific view:

At the animistic stage men ascribe omnipotence to themselves. At the religious stage they transfer it to the gods but do not seriously abandon it themselves, for they reserve the power of influencing the gods in a variety of ways according to their wishes. The scientific view of the universe no longer affords any room for human omnipotence; men have acknowledged their smallness and submitted resignedly to death and to the other necessities of nature. None the less some of the primitive belief in omnipotence still survives in men's faith in the power of the human mind, taking account, as it does, of the laws of reality.

(1962:88)

Each successive stage credits 'external reality' with more autonomy. Yet even as Freud was proposing his evolutionary schema, Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg were developing their ideas of indeterminacy ideas that categorically deny to 'external reality' its independent existence while also denying to the human mind any claims to omniscience.

Freud drew attention to one mode of 'civilized thought' that remains unreconstructed:

In only a single field of our civilization has the omnipotence of thoughts been retained, and that is in the field of art. Only in art does it still happen that a man who is consumed by desires performs something resembling the accomplishment of those desires and that what he does in play produces emotional effects thanks to artistic illusion just as though it were something real. People speak with justice of the 'magic of art' and compare artists to magicians. But the comparison is perhaps more significant than it claims to be. There can be no doubt that art did not begin as art for art's sake. It worked originally in the service of impulses which are for the most part extinct today. And among them we may suspect the presence of many magical purposes.

(1962:90)

Extinct impulses? Looking at Freud through a contemporary lens means rejecting the notion that some humans are more 'primitive' or 'aboriginal' than others. Biologically and culturally, all individuals of the species *Homo sapiens* share a history of equal duration. Although, as Freud believed, the child might be the father to the man, the so-called primitive is not the child of the so-called civilized. Nor is the neurotic an unreconstructed child-primitive-artist or vice versa. What we have is a diversity of cultures, none of which is closer to the beginning of human history than any other; and a set of human actions whose similarities with each other are discomfiting to those who believe cognitive thinking is the crown of human achievement.

Each culture embodies its own system of organizing experience. Freud can surely be credited with extraordinary insight (even granting the sexist and

cultural-imperialist outlook that stains many of his ideas): how, then, can his views be recomposed to harmonize with today's view of things? Perhaps we should say that certain systems are more porous in relation to the subconscious than other systems. But the ways in which this porosity is encouraged or repressed, guarded, regulated, and used differ vastly not only from culture to culture but also within every culture. Children, neurotics, and 'technicians of the sacred' (Rothenberg 1985) each encounter and filter differently what Ehrenzweig (1970) calls 'primary process'. Children are porous to the unconscious because they have not yet learned how to repress material streaming into their emerging consciousness: their selves are in the process of formation. Neurotics are by definition people whose defences are weak or wrongly positioned but behaviour that might be 'neurotic' in one culture, or in one setting within a given culture, might prove very effective in other contexts. Extremely neurotic people have been not only great artists, but also royals, presidents, tycoons, and war chiefs. Shamans, artists, and others who perform the 'omnipotence of thoughts' seek out teachers and techniques to help them master the powerful impulses streaming into consciousness.

Account after account tells the same story: a future shaman is 'called' but resists the call. But he or she cannot control the experiences 'coming' in the form of dreams, visions, uncontrollable impulses, and sickness. After a period of doubt and terror, the neophyte submits, and finds someone to teach him or her the tricks of the trade. Becoming an artist, even in the West, is not unlike learning to be a shaman; the techniques and the ambivalent social status of artist and shaman approximate each other. In modern Western cultures it might be said that the impulses from which art is made out of the experiences of the artist (the shaman's 'call', the artist's 'raw material') originate in difficult confrontations between daily life and the unconscious. In many cultures such impulses are said to originate with gods, ancestors, demons, ghosts, and the like. I believe these represent material streaming into consciousness as unmediated primary process. The materials of primary process manifest themselves in dreams, visions, obsessive thoughts, trance possession, speaking in tongues, and feared yet violent and erotic wishes. Sometimes these impulses or desires and their manifestations lift the recipient to ecstasy, happy beyond the power of description; and sometimes the recipient is terrified.

Ehrenzweig's theories fit nicely with those of Girard, who believes that lack of differentiation brings about the 'sacrificial crisis' which is remedied by the mimetic violence of ritual. Ehrenzweig celebrates what he calls the 'global vision' of the child systematically sought after by the adult artist which

remains undifferentiated as to its component details. This gives the younger child artist the freedom to distort colour and shapes in the most imaginative and, to us, unrealistic manner. But to him owing to his global, unanalytical view his work is realistic.

(1970:22)

Ehrenzweig sounds like Girard when he says that 'the truly unconscious and potentially disruptive quality of undifferentiation' threatens to introduce 'the catastrophic chaos which we are wont to associate with the primary process' (1970:37-8). But that which terrifies the neurotic is what the artist plays out publicly. Or, as is frequently the case, the artist-neurotic (or shaman-neurotic) is compelled to explore the very process that terrifies him or her. It is fashionable today to say that artists are healthy whereas neurotics are sick that ten years of art are worth a psychoanalytic cure (Sartre on Genet). Perhaps. But from an operational perspective art and neurosis are closely linked because both are generated by a porous and shifting boundary between the unconscious and the conscious. And what art manipulates on an individual basis, ritual does collectively. Ritual gives violence its place at the table of human needs. As Kafka noted,

Leopards break into the temple and drink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again; finally it can be calculated in advance, and it becomes part of the ceremony.

(1954:40)

NEUROLOGY, RITUAL, PERFORMANCE, AND PLAY

One may trace the evolutionary progression of ritual behaviour from the emergence of formulation through the co-ordination of formalized communicative behaviour and sequences of ritual behaviour to the conceptualization of such sequences and the assignment of symbols to them by man.

(d'Aquili *et al.* 1979:37)

D'Aquili and his colleagues propose what they call a 'cognitive imperative': a human being 'automatically, almost reflexively, confronts an unknown stimulus by the question "What is it?" Affective responses such as fear, happiness, or sadness and motor responses are clearly secondary to the immediate cognitive response' (1979:168). If their thesis is true, then humans work from the top down, from the cerebral cortex (cognition) to the old mammalian brain (feelings) and thence down to the brain stem (movement). The human need to make narratives, to tell plausible stories, is, according to d'Aquili, not only 'hard-wired' into the brain but also dominant. But if the brain works from 'top down' it also works from 'side to side'. The cognitive imperative is dialectically linked to the often very powerful, oceanic, and ecstatic experience of ritual that can be understood as a function of brain lateralization. Barbara Lex, another of d'Aquili's associates, proposes that trance and other supremely affective states of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975) results from the extreme stimulation of both the ergotropic (left) and trophotropic (right) hemispheres of the brain.

Exposure to manifold, intense, repetitive, emotion-evoking stimuli ensures uniformity of behaviour in ritual participants.... Rituals properly executed promote

a feeling of well-being and relief, not only because prolonged or intense stresses are alleviated, but also because the driving techniques employed in rituals are designed to sensitize or 'tune' the nervous system and thereby lessen inhibition of the right hemisphere and permit temporary right-hemisphere dominance, as well as mixed trophotropic-ergotropic excitation, to achieve synchronization of cortical rhythms in both hemispheres and evoke trophotropic rebound.

{Lex 1979:120, 144-5}

People seek experiences that provide a 'rebound' or 'spillover', simultaneously exciting both left and right hemispheres of the forebrain (Fischer 1971, Goodman 1986, 1990). Thus the narrativity of the cognitive imperative responds dialectically to the ecstasy of the spill over experience.

These ethological and neurological theories answer some of the questions about ritual performance, but they fail to explain the creative, anti-structural, playful aspects of ritual. Ritual is more than a conservator of evolutionary and cultural behaviour. It is, as Turner (1969) showed, a generator of new images, ideas, and practices. Reviewing the theories of d'Aquili, Turner was troubled by their failure to deal with play:

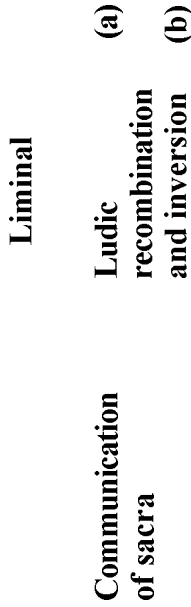
As I see it play does not fit in anywhere particular; it is transient and is recalcitrant to localization, to placement, to fixation a joker in the neuro-anthropological act. .. Playfulness is a volatile, sometimes dangerously explosive essence, which cultural institutions seek to bottle or contain in the vials of games of competition, chance, and strength, in modes of simulation such as theater, and in controlled disorientation, from roller coasters to dervish dancing.... Play could be termed dangerous because it may subvert the left-right hemispheric switching involved in maintaining the social order.... The neuronc energies of play, as it were, lightly skim over the cerebral cortices, sampling rather than partaking of the capacities and functions of the various areas of the brain. As Don Handelman (1977) and Gregory Bateson (1972) have written, that is possibly why play can provide a metalanguage (since to be 'meta' is to be both beyond and between) and emit metamessages about so many and varied human propensities and thus provide, as Handelman has said, 'a very wide range of commentary on the social order' (p. 189). Play can be everywhere and nowhere, imitate anything, yet be identified with nothing.... You may have guessed that play is, for me, a liminal or liminoid mode, essentially interstitial, betwixt-and-between all standard taxonomic nodes, essentially 'elusive'.

(1983:233-4)

For Turner, play cannot be 'located' because it is quintessentially relational. It is not to be found 'in' the brain (or 'in' culture), but is everywhere 'in between'.

Turner celebrated the anti-structural dimensions of ritual the playful, the creative, the artistic. But there is a contradiction between his theories and those of the ethologists and neurologists. To them ritual develops as part of evolution, it is 'wired' into the brain. But Turner casts adrift the creative aspects of ritual, placing these 'betwixt and between'. Perhaps this contradiction can be resolved if ritual, the genre, is considered separately from ritualizing, the experience.

(In technologically 'simpler' societies)



(In technologically 'complex' societies
*Liminaloid'

Innumerable types and genres of
cultural performance including
Theatre

- Separation*
1. In 'leisure' time
 2. In 'special' place
 3. Rehearsals, workshops, etc.

Liminal
Communication of 'sacred', 'archaic', 'mythical', texts as quasi-sacra (Noh kutiyattam, kathakali, gospel drama
Ludic recombination: experimental theatre, surrealism, comedy, clowning (develops rules and structure of subversion), misemono (grotesque spectacle)
(a) Authority of director
(b) 'Chorus line' communitas

Figure 7 The evolution of cultural genres of performance: from 'liminal' to 'liminoid'. {From Turner University of Arizona Press)

Ritual can be understood as a performed behavioural artefact, a structure, an armature, while ritualizing can be conceived of as the in-body experience of performing rituals and as such anti-structural, destabilizing, and liminal. Ritual organizes, conserves, and narrates, while ritualizing brings on hemispheric spillover, oceanic feelings, and radical, playful volatility.

Turner went far beyond Van Gennep in theorizing that the artworks and leisure activities of industrial and post-industrial societies, which he called 'liminoid', were like the rituals of tribal, agrarian, and traditional societies (Figure 7).

Liminality can perhaps be described as a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structure, a gestation process, a fetation of modes appropriate to and anticipating postliminal existence. It is what goes on in nature in the fertilized egg, in the chrysalis, and even more richly and complexly in their cultural homologues.

Theatre is one of the many inheritors of that great multifaceted system of preindustrial ritual which embraces ideas and images of cosmos and chaos, interdigitates clowns and their foolery with gods and their solemnity, and uses all the sensory codes to produce symphonies in more than music: the intertwining of dance, body languages of many kinds, song, chant, architectural forms (temples, amphitheatres), incense, burnt offerings, ritualized feasting and drinking, painting, body painting, body marking of many kinds including circumcision and scarification, the application of lotions and drinking of potions, the enacting of mythic and heroic plots drawn from oral traditions. And so much more. Rapid advances in the scale and complexity of society, particularly after industrialization, have passed this unified liminal configuration through the analytical prism of the division of labour, with its specialization and professionalization, reducing each of these sensory domains to a set of entertainment genres flourishing in the leisure time of society, no longer in a central, driving place.... Nevertheless, there are today signs that the amputated specialized genres are seeking to rejoin and to recover something of the numinosity lost in their *sparagmos*, their dismemberment.

(1990:12)

The workshops in experimental theatre and dance as well as the gropings toward sacred experiences of 'new age shamans' exemplify this effort to rejoin and recover. 'Parashamans'¹ of experimental theatre and dance Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, Peter Brook, and Anna Halprin (to name four of many) practise aesthetics not simply or even primarily to entertain, but to research, recall, re-enact, and experience sacred knowledge, ritual ecstasy, and initiatory permanence (see Grimes 1982:255-66, Halprin 1989, Grotowski 1991, Osinski 1991, Winterbottom 1991, Lendra 1991). It is this explicit intention to transform people that has led these and other performance artists to investigate in a most rigorous way the techniques of traditional performers and ritual specialists both within and beyond Western cultures. The practice of

the parashamans turns orthodox ritual on its head. Ethological procedures are mimicked, neurological responses are elicited **but** in the service of ideas and visions of society that are anything but conservative. Thus has the avant-garde enlisted ritual in art's permanent revolution.

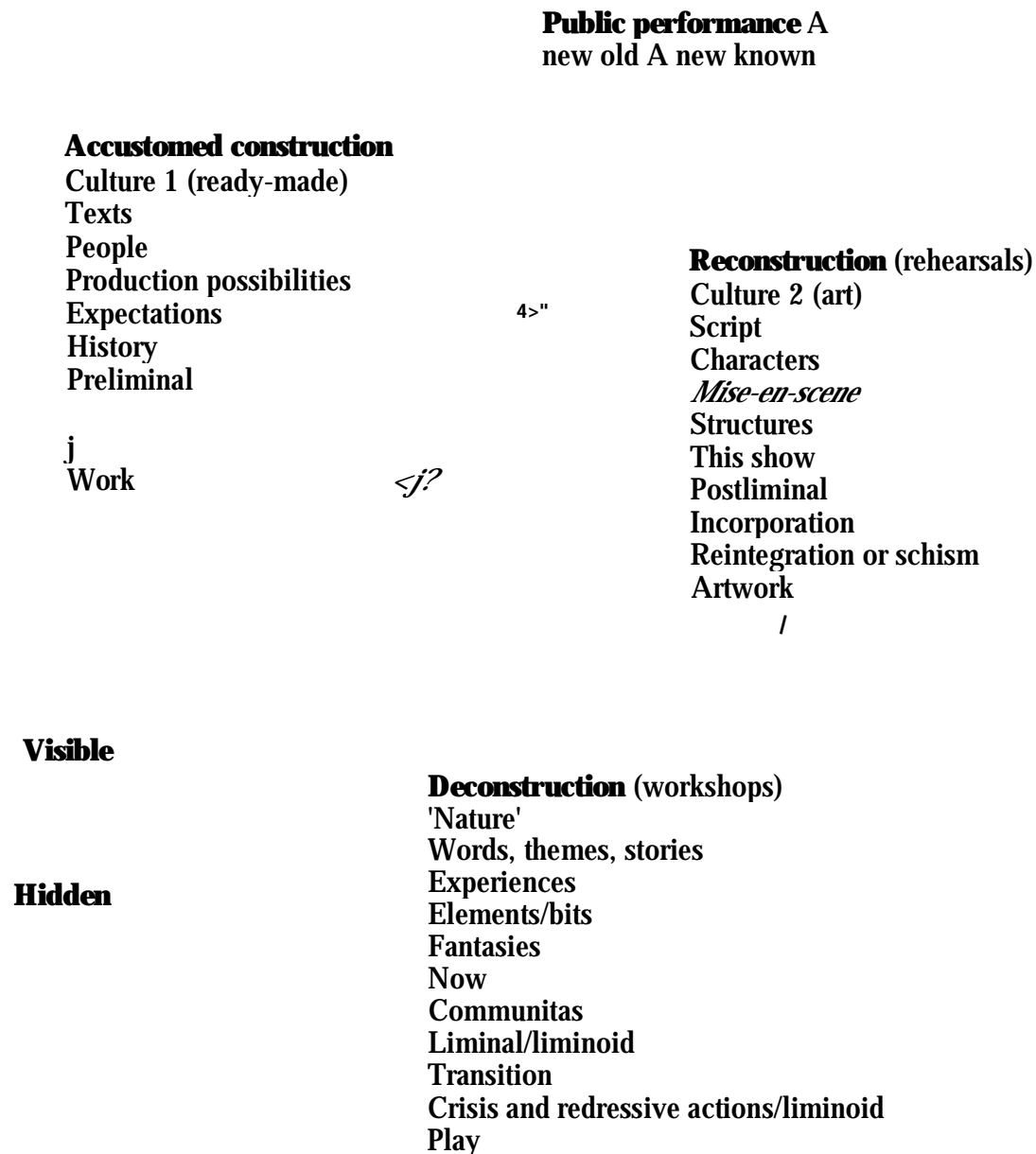


Figure 8 The process of deconstruction and reconstruction in ritual and rehearsal (after Scheduler 1985:288). Once a performance is 'made' it tends to 'slow up' in relation to the diachronic axis. That is, it changes little as time goes on. While in the phases of deconstruction and reconstruction, however, it changes relatively rapidly. Absolutely 'traditional' performances would be 'vertical' relative to the diachronic axis that is, frozen in time.

RITUAL PROCESS AND TRAINING, WORKSHOP, REHEARSAL PROCESS

Ritual, aesthetic, and social performances are linked at the fundamental processual level of where performances are made. To 'make believe' and to 'make belief' are closely related. Although the rehearsal process and the ritual process are connected, the terms used to describe them do not fit together neatly. This is because scholars have often treated play, art and religion separately. Preparing to do theatre (or music or dance) often includes memorizing gestures, words, sounds and movements, and achieving a mood where apparently 'external' behaviours 'take over' the performer. Behaviour that is 'other' is transformed into the performer's own behaviour. In some genres – ballet in the West, *kathakali* or *noh* in Asia – years of rigorous training reshape the performer's body and muscle memories so that she or he is able to enact properly the very particular codes of the art. A similar process of deconstruction and reconstruction trains the spirit, the emotions, and the intellect.

The prepared performer, reformed by training, is further reshaped by workshops and rehearsals leading up to specific performances. Like the neophyte undergoing initiation who is made to fit the society into which he or she is being initiated, the performer is remade first to fit the genre and then for the specific performance at hand. To achieve such a radical change, the performer, like the initiate, is separated from ordinary existence – trained for years by a master or at school, then isolated for weeks or months of intense rehearsals. The period of training and rehearsal is liminal: betwixt and between, belonging neither to ordinary life nor to the finished performance. Old habits, the old body, old ways of thinking and doing are fiercely attacked, deconstructed, and eliminated even as new ways of doing, thinking, and feeling are being built. In many contemporary performing arts not only the performers but also literary or traditional texts – often the most 'honoured' texts of a culture (e.g. Shakespeare, Kalidasa) – are deconstructed and reconstructed. Figure 8 depicts this process.

CONCLUSIONS

Ritual performances, aesthetic performances and social performances are closely related to each other. Ritual is part of the warp and woof of every kind of performance, sacred and secular, aesthetic and social. But, conversely, aesthetic considerations inform ritual performances. For example, the Yaquis of Mexico and Arizona celebrate a Lenten cycle telling the story of Jesus's pursuit, crucifixion, and resurrection, which they call *Waehma* (Spicer 1980, Schechner 1993). *Waehma* begins on the first Friday after Ash Wednesday and culminates with the redemption of the whole Yaqui community on Holy Saturday. It combines native American ritual clowns and deer dancers with sixteenth-century Spanish religious theatre, and with the narrative of the

Passion introduced to the Yaqui by Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century. Waehma employs both outdoor processions around the Way of the Cross and more private ceremonies occurring inside individual homes. Strictly Catholic ritual imported from Europe is balanced against the drama of pre-Columbian native American masked characters called *chapayekas*, who are enlisted in the pursuit and crucifixion of Jesus.

After a series of highly dramatic scenes performed from Palm Sunday to Good Friday, the *chapayekas*, on Good Friday night, led by Judas their saint, celebrate the crucifixion by dancing drunkenly around a creche or bier containing a small figure of Jesus on the Cross. But sometime during this 'mock Fiesta' Jesus is taken away (soon to be resurrected) and a teddy bear is substituted. By the time the *chapayekas* discover the trick their anger is rendered helpless by drunkenness. But both the anger and the inebriation are played, for during the holy weeks of Lent no Yaqui, least of all those dedicated to the sacred role of *chapayeka*, tastes alcohol. Defeated, the *chapayekas* slink away. But on Saturday morning, joining with their allies the Soldiers of Rome, they storm the church three times in an attempt to recapture Christ. This time the forces of evil are transformed by being drenched with the blood of Jesus represented by leaves and flowers showered on them by Pascolas, deer dancers, *matachini* dancers, and a great crowd of spectators. The *chapayekas* discard their masks, which are burned, and rush into the church, not as enemies of Christ, but as Yaqui men desirous of redemption. Kneeling, they receive blessings. Then begins the year's biggest fiesta, featuring deer dancers, Pascolas, and the life-giving *matachini* dancers. The deer and Pascolas are pre-Columbian, the *matachinis* derive from Europe. The Yaqui manifestly enjoy all this mixing of popular entertainment, church ritual, mournful procession, tragic narrative, deer and *matachini* dancing, parody, tomfoolery and feasting.

Categories slip. Underneath all the performative genres or, better, permeating all performative behaviour is play. Play is in the subjunctive mood, the 'what if or 'as if, the provisional, the open, the anti-structural. Playing confers an ontological status to lying. In such a state of fecund deception humans invent 'unreal' (as yet untreated) worlds. Performance is the way these worlds are given concrete shape in time and space, expressed as gestures, dances, words, masks, music and narratives. Moreover, in the Western theatrical tradition, characters and stories Oedipus, Hamlet, Willie Loman, Godot achieve a kind of archetypal, mythic status. These narratives and characters persist over time; they are 'recreated' by generations of actors, each of whom stamps them with a particular meaning. Socially, too, certain roles the Mother, the President, the Soldier, the Artist, the Judge, the Priest, the Wife, the Farmer, plus many others achieve immanence in concrete shapes and rhythms.

Of course, different cultures handle their own stories, characters and archetypes in different ways. Specifying those differences is a way of comprehending divergent cultural processes. For example, artists, critics and spectators of modern Western theatre demand 'new' and individuated versions

of characters and narratives, whereas Japanese *kabuki* actors readily give up their born names for the names of great actors of past generations. Among the Kwakiutl of the North-west Coast of North America, masks, dances, and stories are valuable and heritable properties. The owner of a mask or dance can perform it himself or invite someone else to perform it for him in which case the main honour of the performance goes not to the dancer but to the owner (much as the producer of a play or film in Western capitalist societies earns the lion's share of the profits).

Despite the similarities, there are no universal themes, narratives, or archetypes of performance. But there are universal ethological and neurological processes shaping the formal qualities of performances; these processes yield unique experiences to those making performances and to those participating in them. The similarity of the ritual process to the training-workshop-rehearsal process is evidence of the close and indeed indissoluble links between ritual, aesthetic, and social performances.

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